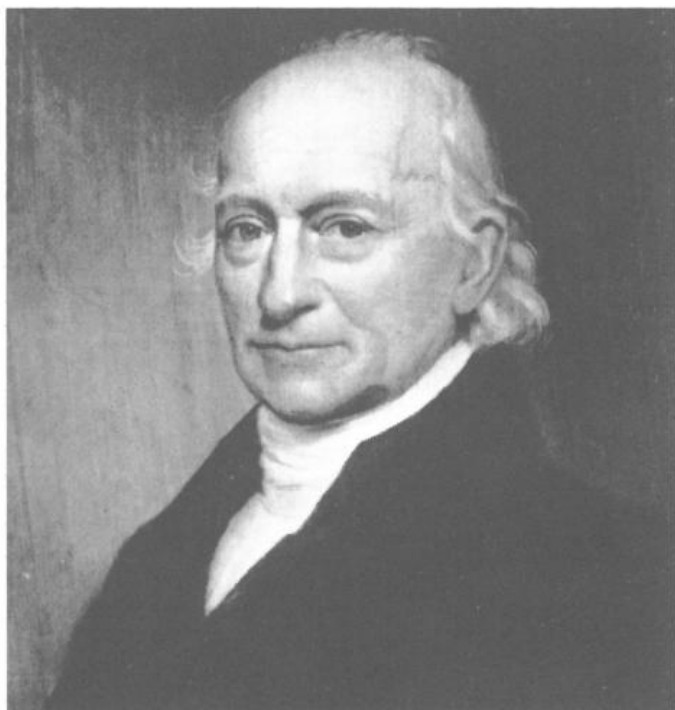
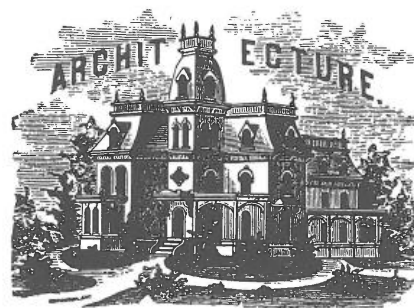


A Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Maine



Charles Vaughan
1759-1839

At the age of twenty-four, Charles Vaughan mused on his future career. He had already found a brief stint in the military not to his liking and was presently unhappy managing family-owned plantations in Jamaica. In a letter to his parents, he rejected the mercantile business as unsuited to his "habits" and farming in America as too unproductive, though he admitted that there was "no line I should prefer to a country occupation."¹ Had he considered architecture, in which he later showed some ability, he might also have seen that as unprofitable. The one fee he is known to have collected would not have bought a cloth for his floor.² Events of the following two decades proved the accuracy of his self-assessment.

Born in Jamaica on June 30, 1759, to Samuel and Sarah Hallowell Vaughan, Charles Vaughan was raised as a member of the English privileged class. His father owned several West Indian plantations, but was primarily a London merchant. His maternal grandfather was Benjamin Hallowell of Boston, one of the

proprietors of the Hallowell Purchase. Fifth in a family of nine children, the young Charles earned little space in family chronicles. His older brothers attended schools in London and the Midlands; and Charles quite likely received a similar education, although probably without the university experience accorded the eldest.³

In 1786, after failure at one Jamaica plantation, Vaughan decamped to Philadelphia, where his brother John was in business. He then moved on to Massachusetts and claimed a Hallowell address when made a citizen of that state in 1788. As the only family member with American citizenship, Charles was the logical individual to oversee the family's Maine lands and thus was placed in charge of them.⁴ He subsequently undertook to turn what was then a small river settlement called "the Hook" or "Bombahook" into a commercial center, establishing wharves, stores, warehouses, worker housing, and a brewery, as well as grist, saw, and fulling mills. He had ships built to carry goods to supply the stores and set out to establish a new port near the mouth of the Kennebec for use when the river was frozen. He developed a farm on family lands to serve as an example in wheat production. He participated in the establishment of a local church and was a founding trustee of Hallowell Academy.⁵

Any one of the commercial enterprises might have brought success if well directed, but Vaughan was in Hallowell only part of each year. His winters were spent in Boston, where he became intrigued with the possibilities of investments in other Maine lands, in foreign shipping, and in Boston real estate development. Meeting with reverses in all three of these areas, he was too over-extended to be able to satisfy his creditors. In 1798-99 Charles Vaughan spent time in debtor's prison.⁶

Undoubtedly Vaughan's difficulties owed much to poor timing and simple bad luck, but his personality also played a part. Samuel Vaughan once told his son's fiancée that his only fears about Charles were of his "extream [sic] good nature, generosity and philanthropy leading him to exceed the austere bounds of a rigid frugality...", and it is clear that some of his poorer investments were urged by others. Moreover, Vaughan was less than business-like. A cousin recalled that "...he was so entirely deficient in all method, his papers were kept in so confused a manner, that he could never find at the proper time what he wanted."⁷



Figure 1. Robert Hallowell House, Gardiner, circa 1930 view (MHPC).

In 1800, yielding to financial pressures and family persuasion, Charles Vaughan moved his wife and sons to Hallowell. The following year he had a small house erected on land approximately a mile inland from the river. There he lived for the nearly forty years remaining to him, directing his efforts toward improving his stock, raising a notable orchard, and disseminating agricultural information and samples to local farmers.⁸ It was not complete retirement, as he remained active in town affairs and from time to time worried his family by proposing—and sometimes undertaking—new investments.⁹ However, most of his business had passed to other hands. Having proved that he had not proper mercantile or business habits, he settled for the “country occupation” which had once seemed too unprofitable.

Vaughan’s interest in the designing of buildings may have been aroused by a brother-in-law. In 1791 Charles Vaughan married Frances Western Apthorp, whose sister Hannah was the wife of Charles Bulfinch. It was Vaughan who bought the property on which Bulfinch erected the Tontine Crescent, an attempt to bring to Boston the stylish squares and “circuses” found in Europe. On this the latter lost his inheritance.¹⁰ Whatever Vaughan’s earlier interest in architecture had been, it must have been stimulated by planning that undertaking and was not spoiled by its financial failure.

The largest and earliest remaining home designed by Vaughan was the “Homestead”, erected in 1794 when his oldest brother Benjamin made plans to settle in Hallowell. On a magnificent site at the river’s “hook”, commanding views both up and down the Kennebec, was erected a two-story, hip-roofed

dwelling. The house was substantial for the area, though it probably appeared neither large nor especially stylish to a big family newly arrived from England. Its pedimented front doorway was a handsome example of earlier Georgian detail, while the crosstessed mantelpieces in the parlors were, at best, transitional. However, the roof was *au courant* in its low pitch, and large windows provided a suitably Federal lightness. Charles included floor-length windows in the west end of the parlor, reportedly to make it easier for Benjamin’s oldest daughter, an invalid, to see the garden. Benjamin complained that they were impractical, but it was only many years later that the windows were shortened.¹¹

Vaughan designed a distinctive house for his uncle, Robert Hallowell, to use on his summer visits to Maine (Figure 1). Built in 1796 in what is now Randolph, it had the floor size and chimney arrangements of a normal two-story, centerhall structure, though with a different floor plan.¹² Moreover, front and back walls were low, allowing only half-sized windows on the second floor, while the depth permitted a small attic above. There was little exterior trim, except for heavy projecting frames around the windows.

Although this cottage was deemed “without conveniences for a family” and “not suited to my position in society” by Hallowell’s son, it was taller than two other family houses attributed to Charles. One, commonly dated to 1799 and located about a quarter-mile from the Homestead, became the home of his sister, Rebecca Vaughan Merrick, and her husband, John (Figures 2, 3). Like the two previous buildings, it had a five-bay facade, but there was only one high-ceilinged

story below the eaves. Exterior distinction came from the fanlighted front door and from the extension of an octagonal room at the rear. The latter was located at the end of a vaulted central hall lined with bookshelves ingeniously hidden behind paneled doors.¹³ The house which Charles built in Hallowell in 1801 for his own family, known as "Sunset Place", no longer exists, but an old watercolor shows that it was even smaller, a three-bay cottage with lower eaves.¹⁴

All of these dwellings were unexceptional in decorative details. Literary visitors who were entertained at the Homestead over the years reserved their descriptions and their praise for the location and the garden, barely mentioning the house.¹⁵ However, the smaller homes had uncommon room arrangements and thus merited attention. An agricultural treatise published in Philadelphia in 1803 devoted a section to "farmers' habitations" and included floor plans for two houses "lately built in the state of Main [sic] by an English family..." The Merrick House is unmistakable because of its octagonal room and bookcase-lined hall (Figure 4). Plans for a smaller house, said to be owned by "relations by marriage", show the same window positions as the Vaughan farmhouse.¹⁶ In addition to its plan, the latter house was praised for having only a tiny cellar, with the ground floor constructed "of brick and earth... on the principles of farm houses in the experienced old countries." Such floors were reportedly "raised only six or eight inches, with earth, on the common level of the ground" and praised as being "natural, cheap, wholesome, solid, and lasting..." The house also had a very modern convenience: a sink, with a pump, in an attached shed.¹⁷

The early commercial buildings erected by Charles Vaughan have disappeared, and it is not certain if he planned any of Hallowell's religious or academic structures, though two of them, the Academy and the First Church, could have reflected his contributions. Both certainly had some influence on the one public edifice with which the Vaughan name is clearly linked, the 1806 Academy at Gorham (Figure 6). An accounting of monies paid that institution's builder, trustee Samuel Elder (long assumed to have been the designer), contains a notation of "\$12. pd to Mr Vaughan for a plan."¹⁸ When Gorham's planning committee investigated other academies, Hallowell's, as the first in the district, must have been high on their list, particularly as one committee member, Stephen Longfellow, would have known Charles Vaughan from the year of his legislative service in Boston.

Vaughan had a long-standing interest in the Hallowell Academy and may well have designed its early buildings. After the first burned in 1804, he was on the committee which issued a call for bids to erect a new one, giving a full description of the structure planned. Some characteristics (two-story, frame construction, with a belfry) are similar to those of the school erected in Gorham soon thereafter, but the Hallowell building was slightly smaller and less ornate. Gorham Academy had a decorative cornice and a flush-

boarded facade; Hallowell's proposal was for a plain cornice and clapboards on all exterior walls.¹⁹

A second influential Hallowell structure was the "Old South Church" erected in 1796-98. It had much in common with the Gorham Academy in its shape and some details.²⁰ Both were topped by low hipped roofs which were extended to triangular pediments over the center three of five bays on the facades. Both had Ionic pilasters at the upper levels as "supports" for the pediments. Both also had heavy quoins and arched openings. The church was much larger, with three stories on its front and a row of arches at the second story level below paired pilasters, while the Academy's individual pilasters were above a balustraded porch. Nevertheless, similarities of form are striking.

Other major differences were in the decorative features, which were heavy and Georgian on the church, but mostly in the more delicate Federal style on the Academy. Exceptions to this lightness are the latter's quoins and the portico, with Roman-Doric columns, triglyphs, and mutules seeming like hold-overs from an earlier era. Their classicism is somewhat tempered by an unusual carved molding, the design of which might be labelled "egg and brush".

The flush-boarded facade of the Gorham Academy sets off the delicate details surrounding the fanlight and arched central second floor window as well as those delineating the blind lunette in the pediment. Presently white, the lunette was shown in early photos to have been painted a dark color, better to give the impression of a real window. Each arch has its own arrangement of muntins as well as of trim. The latter includes an irregular, twisted rope motif around the blind window, a band of fluting on the second floor, and a whimsical combination of grouped flutes with a wavy line of circular indentations around the door's fanlight. The features suggest a designer sufficiently sure of himself to break away from copying conventional motifs, but also aware of what was being used elsewhere. The building's cornice echoes this feeling. Instead of dentils or modillions, it has freestanding brackets which resemble the outer edges of modillions and give further lightness to the structure.

It has often been suggested that the Academy's details must have come from one of the two volumes of Asher Benjamin's builder's books which had then been published. Except that modillion drawings vaguely suggest the brackets, no detail closely resembles a drawing in either of those books. More likely the trim represents adaptation of motifs found on existing structures.²¹

Although he was undeniably important in launching Hallowell as a center of trade, contemporary accounts suggest that Charles Vaughan's later life in that town was over-shadowed by his older brother, who had taken over most of the businesses. As their cousin observed, speaking of Charles' "lack of exactness and method" in commerce, "This want of success prevented a due appreciation in Hallowell of what he had



Figure 2. John Merrick House, Hallowell, circa 1860 water color of facade by John Vaughan Merrick, published in *Old Hallowell on the Kennebec* (MHPC).



Figure 3. Merrick House, circa 1860 water color of rear elevation by John Vaughan Merrick, *Old Hallowell on the Kennebec* (MHPC).

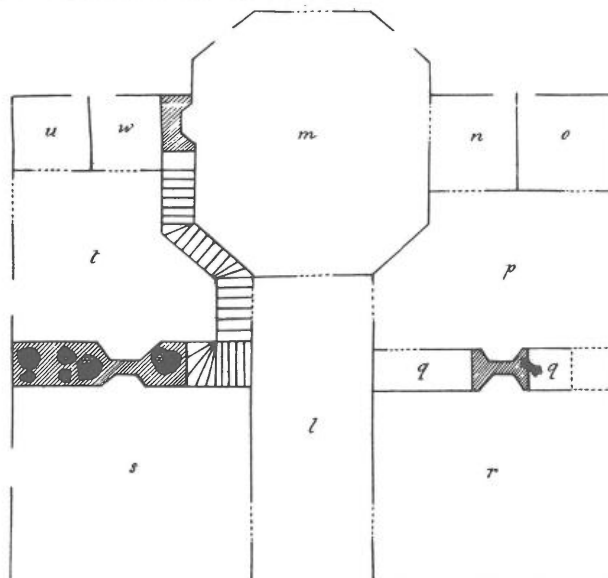


Figure 4. Plan of Merrick House, Plate XIV in *Forsythe's Treatise on the Culture and Management of Fruit Trees* (MHPC).

done for the town, notwithstanding which he continued ever ready to engage in whatever would promote the prosperity of the place."²² Local historians have since given due attention to Vaughan's early role in establishing Hallowell, but have said little about his architectural contributions. However, his accomplishments in that field were real. Gorham Academy attests to an ability to create an elegant design, while, in providing original floor plans for unpretentious farm homes, he was ahead of most contemporaries.

Joyce K. Bibber
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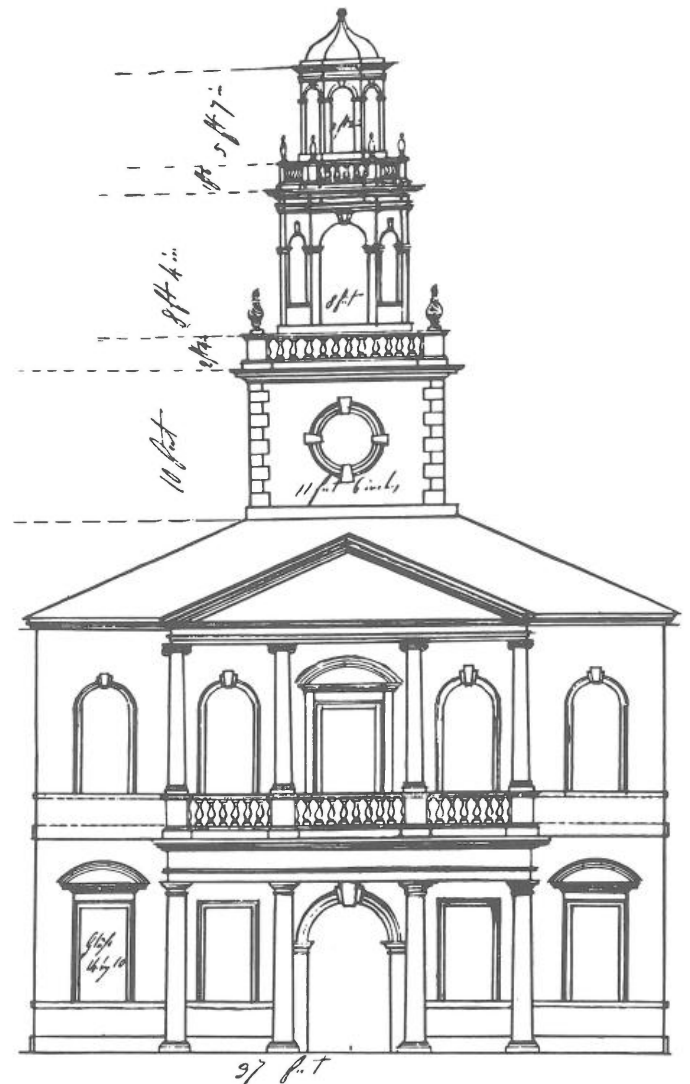


Figure 5. Elevation drawing of Court House, Salem, by Samuel McIntire, plate 54 in *Mr. Samuel McIntire, Carver The Architect of Salem* by Fiske Kimball (Courtesy of the Essex Institute). This design may have served as a model for Gorham Academy, see note 20.



Figure 6. Gorham Academy, Gorham, circa 1905 view (MHPC).

NOTES

- ¹ Charles Vaughan to Samuel Vaughan, February 14, 1784. This letter and his military commissions may be found in the Charles Vaughan papers, Bowdoin College. Unless otherwise noted, all correspondence is from this collection.
- ² The fee was \$12. Benjamin Vaughan paid \$20 for a floor cloth a few years earlier. Gorham Academy Papers, University of Southern Maine Archives; notation of January 3, 1800, Benjamin Vaughan Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.
- ³ Information on the Vaughan family is from Emma Huntington Nason, *Old Hallowell on the Kennebec*, Augusta, 1909, pp. 73-98; Mary Vaughan Marvin, *Benjamin Vaughan, 1751-1835*, Hallowell, 1979; and family letters.
- ⁴ Marvin, pp. 12-13; Samuel Vaughan to Charles Vaughan, April 20, 1789. How he became a citizen so easily is unclear, but as later legislation made aliens ineligible to hold land, the move proved invaluable. The citizenship paper is among his letters.
- ⁵ William Allen, "Now and Then", *Collections of the Maine Historical Society*, Volume VII, pp. 267-286. See also R. H. Gardiner, "Jones' Eddy on the Kennebec", *Collections of the Maine Historical Society*, Volume IV, p. 41, on the attempt to build a seaport.
- ⁶ Vaughan letters, 1791-99.
- ⁷ Samuel Vaughan to Frances Apthorp, March 2, 1790; Robert Hallowell Gardiner, *Early Recollections*, Hallowell, 1936, p. 63. Charles' sisters' letters frequently commented about how well he was liked, but his father and brothers often chided him for poor business practices.
- ⁸ John Vaughan to Charles Vaughan, November 14, 1800; Sarah Vaughan to Charles Vaughan, May 11, 1801; Allen, pp. 280-281; Annie F. Page, *Historical Sketches: The Old South Church*, Hallowell, 1900, p. 16.
- ⁹ Sarah Vaughan to Charles Vaughan, August 1, 1806; June 10, 1815; John A. Vaughan to parents, October 25, 1825.
- ¹⁰ Harold Kirker, *The Architecture of Charles Bulfinch*, Cambridge, 1969, pp. 79, 115. Deeds relating to the Tontine development are among the Charles Vaughan Papers.
- ¹¹ Nason, p. 84; Marvin, pp. 59-60; William Warren Vaughan, *Hallowell Memories*, Hallowell, 1931, pp. 55-56.
- ¹² Gardiner, p. 12. In 1927 the house was moved across the river to the grounds of the Gardiner estate, Oaklands. Marvin, pp. 135-136. Skillful "restoration" at the time, by a member of the Boston architectural firm of Coolidge, Shepley, Bulfinch, and Abbott, makes it difficult to tell how much of the present interior is original.
- ¹³ Gardiner, pp. 110, 140; Margaret M. Bearce, "Hallowell Homes", in *Historic Hallowell*, compiled by Katherine H. Snell and Vincent Ledew, Augusta, 1962, p. 38. If this was the farmhouse belonging to C. V. which John Merrick proposed to buy in 1799, it had actually been built earlier and lived in by a farm manager. John Merrick to Charles Vaughan, March, 1799.
- ¹⁴ Nason dates this house to 1802, but the elder Mrs. Vaughan's "I hear you are getting up a house" in April of 1801 suggests the earlier date, as so small a home would not have taken over a year to build. An earlier remark by Frances Vaughan's sister, "Your dwelling must be quite Vaughanish", may also refer to the new house. Anna Storer to Frances Vaughan, January 4, 1801.
- ¹⁵ Timothy Dwight, *Travels in New England and New York*, Volume II, New Haven, 1821, pp. 218-219; Edward Augustus Kendall, *Travels Through the Northern Parts of the United States in the Years 1807 and 1808*, Volume III, New York, 1809, pp. 121-122.

- ¹⁶ An American Farmer, *The Epitome of Mr. Forsythe's Treatise on the Culture and Management of Fruit Trees...and Further, of Common Principles in Building Farmers Habitations*, Philadelphia, 1803, pp. 183-85, Plate XIV. Further corroboration for attribution of plans is in the postscript of a letter from John Vaughan, in Philadelphia, requesting sketches of ground [floor plans? letter torn] of the houses of C. V. and Merrick. John Vaughan to Benjamin Vaughan, December 16, 1802, Vaughan Correspondence, Massachusetts Historical Society.
- ¹⁷ *An American Farmer*, pp. 136, 183-85.
- ¹⁸ The account, dated September 6, 1806, is in the archives at the University of Southern Maine. Assuming that "Mr. Vaughan" was Charles Vaughan is not the leap of faith that it perhaps may seem. Census records indicate only the Hallowell Vaughans and Portland's William Vaughan family in the area at the time. Neither Benjamin nor the Portland men had any connection with architecture—nor was either likely to have charged for such a plan: William Vaughan was one of the wealthiest local men in the pre-Embargo era, while Benjamin did not charge for his medical consultation. Charles would have needed the money.
- ¹⁹ Nason, p. 216. Specification appeared in the *Kennebec Gazette*, Augusta, February 28, 1805, when contractors' bids were solicited.
- ²⁰ The Old South Church burned in 1878. A photograph is shown in Harold Kirker, "Charles Bulfinch, 1763-1844", *A Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Maine*, Volume II, Number 7, 1985, p. 2.
Papers of the late Arthur J. Gerrier suggest a relationship between Gorham Academy's design and "A View of the Court House in Salem", Samuel McIntire, architect, printed in the *Massachusetts Magazine* of 1790 and perhaps another between the academy's belfry and that of Christ Church, Cambridge, Peter Harrison, architect, depicted in that same magazine in July, 1792. The similarity is striking. Charles Vaughan may well have been familiar with the drawings and with the actual buildings. The court house could even have inspired the design of South Church, Hallowell.
- ²¹ Plans at the time were not always very explicit, and as builder, Elder may have been free to decide on details. He could have been influenced by trim on new buildings recently erected in Portland or in Gorham.
- ²² Gardiner, p. 121.

LIST OF KNOWN COMMISSIONS IN MAINE BY CHARLES VAUGHAN

- "Vaughan Homestead", Benjamin Vaughan House, Hallowell, 1794, Extant
 Robert Hallowell House, Randolph, 1796, moved to Gardiner, 1927, Extant
 "Elm Hill Farm", John Merrick House, Hallowell, 1799, Extant
 "Sunset Place", Charles Vaughan House, Hallowell, 1801, Destroyed
 Second Hallowell Academy, Hallowell, 1805, Destroyed
 Gorham Academy, Gorham, 1806, Extant

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